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### On the Origins of the Institute

Martin Chusid  
*New York University*

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**American Institute for Verdi Studies**

Department of Music  
New York University  
268 Waverly Building  
New York, N.Y. 10003

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## *On the Origins of the Institute*

*by Martin Chusid*

After the Congress of Verdi Studies in Chicago of September 1974, several of the participants felt the need for an organization that would link the unprecedented recent surge of interest in Verdi research with performances of his music. Mary Jane Matz, Andrew Porter, and I met a number of times over lunch, and we were soon joined in our planning by Claire Brook, Patrick Smith, and Philip Gossett. From the very beginning our efforts were encouraged, indeed prodded, by Mario Medici, Director of the Istituto di Studi Verdiani of Parma, Italy. It was the four international congresses (Venice, 1966; Verona, 1969; Milan, 1972; and Chicago, 1974) and the many publications (*Bolletini*, *Quaderni*, and *Atti*) of that organization that had provided so much of the impetus for the increased Verdi activity.

In order to provide a very broad base for an Institute for Verdi Studies, performers, scholars, operatic organizations, critics, publishers, and individual Verdi enthusiasts were approached to serve as advisers. Their response and interest was immediate and remarkable (as the current list of the Advisory Board, below, can attest); such an Institute was evidently both desired and needed.

Our first sustained effort has been to establish an archive of Verdi resources with which to help fulfil our aims. In this we were exceedingly fortunate. New York University offered to house the archive in the spacious and attractive music division of Bobst Library, recently completed on historic Washington Square in the Greenwich Village area of Manhattan. Mary Stringham, widow of the late Professor Scott Stringham, donated to the fledgling archive his entire library of Verdi materials. Scott, one of the most active and likable of the present generation of American Verdians, taught at the University of West Virginia, Morgantown, before his untimely death in the fall of 1974. There he wrote articles, translated librettos into English, and lectured constantly on the life and music of the composer he admired most. His important collection now forms the cornerstone of an already substantial Verdi library. Approximately 500 items were in the Stringham gift: books, scores, librettos, commercially and privately made recorded materials, programs, and Scott's personal notes. Together with the original holdings in the music division and recent gifts by David Lawton, Howard Gordon, and Mary Jane Matz, the archive now consists of more than 1,000 items, many of great rarity and of the highest interest. It includes twenty-seven of the operas in full score. Typical of the spontaneous outpouring of support for the archive was the offer by Dario Soria, Director of the Metropolitan Opera Guild, to provide a copy of a precious document in his possession: the contract signed in the summer of 1847 by Verdi and the directors of the Paris Opéra for the revision and translation into French of *I Lombardi*.

As part of our effort to increase still further the value of the archive, proposals for support in specific projects has been made to foundations and private individuals. I would like to close this brief resumé of the origins of the Institute by noting the intention of the Center College Regional Arts Center of Danville, Kentucky, to mount a production of the first version of Verdi's *Macbeth*, a score unheard in the United States for more than a hundred years. The Institute has been asked to prepare the materials for the performances, which will take place in the fall of 1977, and which will be repeated at a number of other regional arts centers. With the support of its members and friends, the AIVS will continue to assemble information and materials, and will do all in its power to assist performers, researchers, students, and any one interested in the life and music of Verdi to achieve the twin goals of increased understanding and more effective performances. *Evviva Verdi!*

